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ABSTRACT

Today work goes on 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and is about acceleration and access. Workers need balance more than ever. In fact, recent college graduates value work/life balance as their key factor in selecting employers. This paper, written for career counselors, defines balance as encompassing emotional, spiritual, physical, and developmental components; taking beliefs, dreams, and experiences into account; living in the present; and taking action. Balance can be expressed in many different ways such as mobility; flexibility; resilience; fulfillment; yearning; awareness; peace; energy; and relaxation. A discussion of what individuals can do to create work/life balance offers 13 suggestions. Fifteen suggestions for infusing work balance into organizations are also provided. The paper concludes by reminding career counselors that they must develop their own balance before they can influence other people, organizations, and industries. (MKA)

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Get the Balance Right

by

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Get The Balance Right

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No small irony that my recent birthday gifts included these book titles – *Living the Simple Life: A Guide to Scaling Down and Enjoying More* and *Something More: Excavating Your Authentic Self.*

On Mother's Day this year, my son's favorite teacher gave me the book, *The Art of Doing Nothing: Simple Ways to Make Time for Yourself.*

This summer, out of the blue, my husband sent me this book, *Self-Nurture: Learning to Care For Yourself As Effectively as You Care For Everyone Else.*

Now I'm at the Global Career Issues Forum to talk about Work/Life Balance.

We crave ways to make sense of these crazy times. What do our clients and students want? What do our associates and employees want? What do you want?

Work now happens 24/7. Work is more about acceleration and access. So we need balance more than ever. The popular magazine *Fast Company* holds the credo, "Work is Personal," so check out these cover stories. "The Good Life: Create Great Products, Beat the Competition, Make Good Money, Go Home at 5 O'Clock" (January 1999) and "How to Design a Life that Works: Work, Travel, Money, Family, Sleep, Fun – How Much is Enough?" (July 1999).

Earlier this year, a *New York Times Magazine* cover story identified you and me as "the liberated, exploited, pampered, frazzled, uneasy, new American worker."

Even in career development, we speak of work in terms of identify, fulfillment, soul and expression. Just as we are in charge of our careers, we need to take care of our balance. As we motivate and advise other people to manage their own careers, we must negotiate and decide our own sense of balance.

Or as a sign at the Franklin Covey shop tells me, "Inflict Balance."

I've spoken at this conference since 1993, four times on Generation X, and even here, the concept comes up again. Just this year, published surveys from Ernst & Young and Price

Waterhouse Coopers noted that recent college graduates value "work/life balance" as their key factor in selecting employers. This issue relates to recruiting, management and retention.

In 1999, the *Christian Science Monitor* highlighted Generation X, employees in their twenties and thirties, in a series about the new workplace. The top priority of this generation was identified as "work/life balance."

Finally, this text we will use today specifically mentions Generation X. This quote is from *Work and Family – Allies or Enemies: What Happens When Business Professionals Confront Life Choices* (Stewart Friedman & Jeffrey Greenhaus, Oxford University Press. 2000). "If Gen-Xers don't succeed in forcing a shift in the very concept of a career, the balance between work and family we desire will remain out of our reach."

I am on a mission – to define balance, create balance, encourage balance.

I invite you to reflect on how you want to define balance. I challenge you to relate ideas on how this process can unfold for individuals and organizations. And I support you, as we come up with specific strategies, themes and recommendations in our action plans.

As we move ahead, I want to share this perspective, looking at balance through our choices and our values, the essence of career development.

Recommendations Developed by Participants at the Global Career Issues Forum.

Going beyond work and family as we consider work/life balance, what about art, health and faith? What about play, the real spirit of "recreating" ourselves?

Why did people come to the ICDC? They wanted to know how to incorporate balance in their own lives. They wanted to hear stories from other professionals who were wrestling with similar questions and concerns. Finally, they wanted to discover how to take these ideas back to their offices, schools, agencies and homes.

How do we define balance?

- Balance encompasses emotional, spiritual, physical and developmental components.
- Balance takes our beliefs, dreams and experiences into account.
- Balance is living in the present.
- Balance is taking action.
- Balance can be expressed in many different ways - mobility, flexibility, resilience, ease, flow, fulfillment, connections, yearning, awareness, peace, energy and reflection.

What can we do as individuals to create work/life balance?

- Reflect on your values, priorities, choices and decisions. What works right now? What needs to change? Think about writing your own mission statement with clear, immediate, relevant objectives that may be updated constantly.

- We need to ask ourselves first, "What price are you willing to pay? What tradeoffs are you willing to make?"

- Consider this question. "What are the consequences of my choices?"

- Assess the areas of imbalance in your life (maybe use the popular metaphor of a wheel, with the spokes representing various facets that are important to us, such as career, family, community, school, recreation, spirituality, health). What do you want to change? What can you do now to start making small adjustments?

- Remember that everyone is an individual. The concept of balance is relative to our own experiences, dreams, finances, health. We must get our priorities straight, which means digging deep into our true mission in life.

- Seek your own resources and services to maintain self-awareness.

- Get comfortable with downshifting. Technology is a drug that can get out of control. Every once in awhile, turn off telephones, laptops, organizers, televisions.

- Respect values that other people hold about work/life balance, through active listening, coaching, mentoring, 360-degree feedback.

- Listen to your clients. Learn from your clients.

- Model this behavior of work/life balance for our clients, students and associates.

- Empower ourselves first, so that we can empower other people.

- Show our true selves at all times, so that our employers, associates and clients know who they are dealing with and where we come from.

- Speak your own truth. Be courageous. Take risks.

How can we infuse work/life balance into organizations?

- Realize that livelihood often serves as the essential fulcrum to work/life balance. Our livelihood allows access to our choices - how do we want to spend our time, energy and

money? Therefore, career development is crucial in schools and workplaces. The process of career development facilitates the selection and maintenance of our livelihood.

- Clients and students must know a company's mission, culture and style. Research the unwritten rules of the company. Provide website addresses, annual reports, trade journals to gather information. Encourage clients and students to do this "field research" on various industries, organizations and leaders.

- Make career development a mandatory part of the school curriculum.

- We need to coach clients on the importance of "knowing yourself." Give a "Self-Discovery Tool Kit." Give values clarification exercises to assist in making choices. Link these activities to the concept of balance in workshops and classes. Once they identify their priorities, encourage them to complete an action plan to take steps to bring about work/life balance.

- Talk to clients about how to balance career aspirations and expectations with family, community, health, financial and spiritual needs. Mention priorities and sacrifices.

- Identify each employee's top values. How are these values met in organization and family situations? Continue the process of self-awareness based on shifting values, both personally and professionally. Develop a matrix for rating values to ascertain conflicts in organizations, families and individuals. Consider these conflicts – where is a shift possible? Coach clients and organizations through this process.

- Implement management training to create awareness for retention issues. Define values and how these values fit in the workplace. We need ways to improve the bottom line. How can we sell these ideas from the business perspective?

- Educate executives on how work/life balance positively influences recruitment, retention and productivity.

- Start early. Develop curriculum on work/life balance that starts in the elementary schools. Integrate the idea of work/life balance in various subjects, such as literature, mathematics, science, history.

- Involve the media! Contact Oprah Winfrey!

- As a pilot program, encourage a family-sensitive company to incorporate work/life balance as business strategy. See how productivity is impacted. Organize a task force to study how businesses are run in Europe, in terms of work/life balance. Look at flexible schedules, job sharing, extended holidays can be arranged.

- Utilize a measurement of the ebbs and flows of work/life balance. Since balance does not occur constantly, how can we examine this process through journaling, workshops, meditation?

- Encourage employees or jobseekers to find out organizational values and needs, then check for alignment.

- Open a transparent access to information on other employment opportunities within an organization.

- Measure the results of implementing work/life balance. Conduct surveys on retention, morale, efficiency, revenue.

Teach the new generation about how to research and select careers that allow for work/life balance. Create and publicize "employers of choice" within various industries. Encourage sequencing careers, phasing times of chaos with respites of calm. Look at updating professional skills, which allows people to work smarter, not work harder.

The message of work/life balance is the same message that we present for career development. We are responsible. We are accountable. We must get the balance right for ourselves before we can even think of influencing other people, organizations and industries. We must start now.